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World Summit for Social Development, including the role of the United Nations system in promoting social development

Statement submitted by the International Co-operative Alliance, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

* E/1993/100.

STATEMENT REGARDING THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), one of the oldest non-governmental organizations with category I consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, is the representative of national cooperative organizations in over 90 countries, which in turn have approximately 700 million individual members.

The ICA and its members welcome the decision to convene the World Summit for Social Development and the attention given to it by the Economic and Social Council. The cooperative movement intends to take an active role in the preparatory process.

The ICA particularly welcomes the focus on the three core issues established for the Summit - social integration, poverty reduction and employment expansion. All participants in the Summit process should address the best ways and means of attaining these objectives.

One strategy which should receive attention is the strengthening of people's organizations in all countries. The 1993 UNDP Human Development Report identified very clearly the benefits which accrue when development is not only for the people but also by the people. Cooperatives, as locally controlled membership organizations, are one of the best (although by no means the only) structures to promote effective people's participation.

The March 1993 ILO experts' meeting on cooperatives reached similar conclusions. It encouraged Governments to support but to refrain from unduly controlling national cooperative movements. It also noted the important role of worker-owned cooperatives in creating productive employment, often in difficult conditions. Cooperatives are essentially designed to provide needed economic and social services for their members, which makes them a useful vehicle for empowerment of people with limited resources. They are not, however, a tool for the implementation of national social programmes. To be successful, they must be established on the initiative of their members.

The advantages of cooperative development are now increasingly recognized. The United Nations, ILO and FAO collaborate with four non-governmental organizations, including the ICA, in the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Co-operatives (COPAC). It is significant that the focal point for cooperatives within the United Nations has historically been the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs.

As institutions around the world prepare their strategies to attain the objectives of the World Summit, attention should be placed on the strengthening of cooperatives as one means of creating the self-help structures that are necessary for effective people's participation in their own development.